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Savage, Sarah Chauncey.
Manoah

MANOAH:

OR,

Promise of the Life that now is.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE FORMATION OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF," "THE RIGHT USE OF SPEECH," &c.

Surely thy sweet and wondrous love
Shall measure all my days:
And as it never shall remove,
So neither shall my praise.
GEORGE HERBERT.

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OR,

PROMISE OF THE LIFE THAT NOW IS.

"GODLINESS," saith the Scripture, "is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." With regard to the life that is to come, the promise is to be viewed only in its general tenor. Relating to a totally different sphere and mode of existence, it cannot furnish a precise account of the conditions which it announces. It simply sets before us the blessing and the curse,—on the one side, entire exemption from evil and attainment to the highest intelligence and happiness; on the other, incal-

culable increase of suffering and irrecoverable and continuous moral declension. The figurative presentment of the future state is adapted to human conceptions, and, according to the intention of such language, gives shape and substance to abstract or purely spiritual thought. An affluent yet familiar imagery affords not so much a description as a standard of comparison whereby to estimate the blessedness of heaven. Pure gold and precious stones, white raiment, the crown and the harp, unfading light and living fountains, assure us that all that we can apprehend of beauty and delight, of dignity and permanence, pertains to the abode and being of those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

As it regards the life that now is, the promise is more susceptible of examination. We are permitted to ascertain not only its import but its minutest application. The Scripture declares the

profitableness of godliness, states in what it consists, and exhibits God's dealings with those who are his children not by creation only, but by regeneration and adoption. In all time the fulfilment of the promise is discernible. But it must often be traced through dissimilar appearances and disconnected operations and effects, and with no small hinderance of careless observation and imperfect apprehension on the part of Christians themselves. Not without reason may they sometimes be deemed ignorant of the true objects of desire, and of what constitutes the promise which they profess to appreciate and claim.

Scripture promise or assurance concerning our present or eternal state, is of the nature of a covenant. It is God's announcement that on the performance of certain conditions he will bestow certain benefits. The knowledge of God and of his requirements is essential to the entertainment of

the promise because essential to the intelligent consideration of its provisions. The means of acquaintance with God are *study of the Scriptures* and *prayer*. With each of these is connected a special and spiritual influence. Each method is dependent on the other. With fuller perception of God as he is revealed in his word, there must be an increasing sense of personal concernment in his declarations and an increasing desire of application to him. Prayer is based on the representations of God contained in the Bible, on the modes of approach therein indicated, on the hopes therein provided of answer and acceptance. It is not simply recognition of God as Creator and Ruler, nor petition for the supply of our wants. It is a means of acquiring spiritual wisdom which God has appointed and distinguished. It exercises a reflex action, but that is subordinate to its use as a medium of Divine communication. If the

Christian obtains a right understanding of prayer, he is instructed not only as to his present character and condition, but also as to the relations, capabilities, and needs which connect him for ever with God and a purely spiritual existence. To know these, is to be persuaded of the reasonableness of godliness, and to estimate aright the promise afforded to such a habit of mind and life.

No Christian duty, perhaps, has been more discussed, illustrated, and enforced, than that of prayer. As a theory, prayer occupies a prominent position in the theological system. From the existence and sovereignty of a Creator are immediately deduced the relation and obligation of the creature. Prayer is an expression or confession of this relation, and of all that it includes. It is intercourse with God. It is a voice out of the silence of material creation asking for explanation of what is, for direction as to what is to be done.

The mind untaught by Revelation may perceive the truth in part by the things which are made, understanding by them eternal power and Godhead. If it glorifies this power as God, and is thankful for the gifts of the visible creation, it performs the act of prayer.

The subject of prayer is presented with remarkable fulness in both the history and the doctrine of the Bible. Some scriptural commands are comparatively obscure. Many particulars connected with the required performance are omitted in the precept. The motive is exhibited rather than the mode. But the duty of prayer, though partly contingent as to time, attitude, and expression, is so definitely presented that neither perplexity nor misapprehension is possible. We are commanded and entreated to pray. We are to pray humbly and to pray boldly. We are to pray in season—at the convenient and appointed times, and out of

season—at the times ordinarily otherwise employed. We are to pray in joy and in sorrow, alone and in company, in our own house, and in the house of God. We may pray with lifted voices, or, like Hannah, speaking in our hearts. No human eye may behold the moving of our lips, no sound fall from them on human ear, but God understandeth our thought afar off. We cannot pray too often. Importunity is effective with the selfish friend and the unjust judge. God, both bountiful and righteous, sometimes grants to the one asking, opens to the one knocking; or, if he sees fit to "bear long" and allow his elect to cry day and night to him, in his own time he will avenge them speedily. We can never be without hope that he will hear us; nor, so broad is the sphere, so multiform the mode of his operation, can we perhaps ever decide with certainty that he has not heard us. Prayer is the first Christian

act of the child, and the saint's last exercise of faith and love. Prayer is the first step in conversion, for it is a moving of the soul toward God when it discovers in him its only safety and help. The Christian is often in the attitude of prayer, but the minutes thus passed give small account of his praying life. His thoughts are of God in observation of his ways, in acknowledgment of his benefits, in desires for greater nearness to him and for the extension of his rule; and this communion with God, though not always in the form, is the essence, the spirit, of prayer. That is a low view of prayer which restricts it to the morning and evening exercise, the reverential posture, and the setting forth of the more pressing necessities of the body and soul. Perhaps we do not make too bold a statement when we say that the Christian lives never any other life than that of prayer. It is with him an *always bearing about*

in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, and the blessed working is that in that body the *life* also of Jesus is made manifest. "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest," is the promise that the Christian proves, and in his spiritual progress that presence becomes the only good that he craves without qualification. That presence enlightens, comforts, sanctifies him; and what, except its ever fuller indwelling, is there left for him to obtain or desire? "*Absence from the presence of God!*"—exclaimed a dying Christian:—"that is the greatest evil of the universe! that makes the misery of hell!" No less does absence from God constitute the misery of earth. It is the single condition which includes all other suffering and sin.

In the account of the parents of Samson given in the thirteenth chapter of Judges, we find several thoughts which have become familiar to

the Christian inquirer, but to which the mode of statement here employed seems to communicate a special force. Taken together, they afford both valuable suggestions in relation to prayer and a body of instruction with regard to the *answer* to prayer, *i. e.*, the dealings of God with his people, and the fulfilment of that portion of the two-fold promise of godliness which refers to the life that now is. These thoughts put in the form of propositions, are :—

Prayer for spiritual instruction and direction has prevailing power :

Scripture gives encouragement to pray with reference to the small interests of life, or such as are often considered unsuitable subjects of petition :

God's past dealings are a ground of consolation and confident expectation.

Let us follow for a time the line of meditation which is thus pointed out.

PRAYER FOR SPIRITUAL INSTRUCTION AND DIRECTION HAS PREVAILING POWER.

In that part of the book of Judges which gives the life of Samson, we read that it was communicated to Manoah, an Israelite, that he would be the father of a son dedicate to God unto the day of his death. The first recorded act of Manoah was to entreat the Lord for a fuller manifestation of his purpose and for minute direction with regard to the new obligations :—"O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born." To this petition, which was in accordance with his will and prompted by the desire to establish his designs, God "hearkened," and sent again his angel to repeat and confirm the previous announcement.

It appears from this account, as from numer-

ous portions of Scripture, that if a confident hope may be entertained of the acceptance of prayer, it is when the spiritual necessity has been proposed rather than the natural, the fulfilment of God's plans and the spread of his kingdom, rather than the gratification of earthly desires. The Christian, it is true, has ample warrant to seek the supply of his bodily needs. "Give us this day our daily bread," is divine sanction for frequent requests in reference to the requirements of the present condition. "Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things," is intimation of the disposition of a just as well as merciful Being to regard the wants of which he is fully cognizant. Largely, indeed, does he bestow the treasures of his bounty without entreaty and without acknowledgment. On a world of ignorant, careless, and thankless men he causes his sun to shine and his rain to descend. Air, light, and water, the earth

bringing forth grass, and herb, and fruit tree, the lights in the firmament of the heaven which are for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years, the moving creature that hath life, and the fowl that fly above the earth, are his provision alike for the evil and the good. As wonderful are the mechanism and beauty of the frame which contains the fallen soul unrecovered by the great salvation, as of that which contains the soul renewed in the image of God and destined to glorify and enjoy him forever. Many blessings, in addition to the more ordinary, are obtained without special petition. But to a degree the gift is contingent, or, at least, is not to be expected or claimed apart from a mentioned condition:—"all these things shall be added unto you." But how *added?* What must precede this provision of food and drink, this exemption from anxiety as to the body? "Seek ye the kingdom of God." Ascertain your rela-

tions to your Maker, and form on them your theory of life and of eternity. The body is an excellent creation, and more excellent in that it is temporarily conjoined to the soul. Commit it as to its essential and accidental necessities to the care of its Creator. It is the less which is included in the greater, and while there is a promise to the less, to the greater it is repeated, explicit, and abundant. But it is conveyed in covenant only. *Ask*, is the stipulation; *it shall be given*, is the satisfaction. *If ye abide in me and my words abide in you*, is the condition; *ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you*, is the ratification. So the Apostle Paul, speaking concerning spiritual gifts, exhorts to covet them earnestly, constraining the inference that they may be obtained.

Christian, do you need additional warrant or encouragement to apply confidently for spiritual blessings? Perhaps you are at the beginning of

your course and scarcely call yourself a Christian. You are disposed to inquire into a subject in relation to which you have been hitherto ignorant, and, for the most part, indifferent. You have been induced to examine the gospel system of truth and to test its application to yourself by some half acknowledged fear of the future—that future of certain sorrow, sickness, death, and eternity; by the opinions or example of your dearest friend; by the conviction that Christianity is the best safeguard of morals and enforcer of law, and therefore must have an inherent worth; by a severe affliction or an unexpected blessing—for full often by the latter does God bring to him his straying and heedless children. Oh that we could understand all mysteries of your temperament and condition, all knowledge that could remove the hinderance and give impulse to your progress, and that, with the tongue of an angel and the heart of all-believing, all-hoping

love, we could persuade you to begin *at once* the practice of prayer and the careful study of God's word! Some defer the adoption of such a plan of life until they have looked farther into the matter, and have come to a decision as to the reasonableness of the attitude of submission and docility. We do not undervalue in any degree the body of evidence which upholds our faith, nor would we urge you to cease from investigation of any kind that may diminish your perplexity and confirm your wavering purpose. But we would have you prosecute it by divine rather than human guidance. Do not cavil at this view nor urge that it is an assuming of the question. "There is logic," said a sceptic to us, "in every system but the Christian;" and perhaps he was right, judging by his own narrow theory which views logic as the *art* rather than, in its most extensive application, the *science* of reasoning. It is not always by syllo-

gistic process that we arrive at the conclusion of a Christian argument; and synthetic and analytic methods, though working out the most perfect deduction, are in the Christian system applied, combined, and interchanged, after a fashion anomalous in human philosophy. To know your Creator and his requirements, is your strongest obligation. Enter at once on the course of life to which it confines you. Perform your obvious and nearest duties, and trust God for help as to the more difficult. It was perhaps at this point that Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, stood, when Jehu concluded his reproof of him with this commendation: "Nevertheless, there are good things found in thee in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and *hast prepared thine heart to seek God.*" There seems scarcely a distinction between *preparing to seek* God and *seeking* him, yet the phrase of Jehu had its meaning, and conveys a most in-

structive truth. There is a strong analogy between the development of Christian and that of filial obedience and love. The child, imperfect in perception and comprehension, cannot with his whole intelligent nature assent and consent to parental principles and laws. But when convinced of the wisdom and goodness of the parent, he can render complete submission to the parent's will in whatever manner it may be made known. Whensoever or howsoever the new birth occurs, the Christian must pass through a period of spiritual infancy; and God, who knoweth our frame, requires of the babe in Christ but to rest helplessly on him—to lean, and love, and wait, until the hands are strong to do his work, and the feet swift to run in the way of his commandments. A certain effort is to be put forth, even "as a child that is weaned of his mother" *behaves* and *quiets* itself. But in the "great matters," the "things too high," not only

of Divine counsel but of Christian experience, the new disciple is not expected to exercise himself. There is a point at which the analogy fails between natural and Christian development. Infancy in the one case passes altogether and gives place to the self-reliance and independence of manhood; in the other, it passes only as to its absolute ignorance and feebleness. Its privileges of support and protection remain. Its innocence, its submissiveness, its love, increase with increasing knowledge and strength. Show to us the man most faithful in work and most holy in person, and in him we will show you the man most humble and docile, most distrustful of self and dependent on God. "I have never been able in my prayer," said one known and praised in the church, "to get much beyond, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!'"

If thus, Christian, you prepare your heart to seek God, already you have entered on his service.

While you are calling, he answers; while you are seeking, he is found of you. Do not perplex yourself as to the quality or quantity of your prayer. Be not discouraged if there are dark sayings and hard questions in the Holy Scriptures. The matter lies in a nutshell. You know that you have sinned. You perceive that with a tendency to what is good—now and then a gleam of light, there is a more prevailing tendency to evil, and a settled darkness upon your spiritual understanding. That which your consciousness and experience declare, you find confirmed in the history of mankind. In all ages and nations, men have been characterized by the same evil passions and purposes. It is ever the same play with different performers. Confess then to God, the Father of your body and spirit, that you have sinned. Ask for the mercy which you need. Examine your relations to the family and to the world. If you indulge in any open sin, refrain from

it. If you omit any evident duty, set yourself to its performance. Look into the Bible to find the rule of your life and your hope of heaven. Persevere in this course, and in time you will say with all who have made this *venture*—if we may use the distrustful word—of their temporal and spiritual interests, "God is the Lord which hath shewed us light:" "Thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy work:" "Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee."

You may be one of those who bear the Christian name, but who seem never to attain to Christian liberty and peace. William Jay describes you as "always in darkness and alarms, among thorns and briers, always murmuring and complaining, having religion enough to make you miserable, but not enough to make you happy." From your earliest Christian consciousness some

weakness or defect has hindered your spiritual growth, and seems to you irremediable because it is inherited or dependent on physical organization. Some habit clings as closely as the shirt of Nessus adhered to the fabled hero, and almost as hurtfully to your moral being. Of a fearful and desponding temperament, you combat with spiritual foes largely at a disadvantage. You are ever forming resolutions and lamenting that you have broken them. Your conscience is sensitive, even scrupulous, and you are, as James Alexander expresses it, *panic-struck* in view of the standard which it sets for you. You bring your tithes and your offerings, and neglect not weightier matters of the law. But it all seems to little purpose. You are ready to say, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that I have kept his ordinance, and that I have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts? The Christian life is to you a dreary and rugged road

instead of a way of pleasantness and a path of peace. It is ever *self* and *law* to which you look. There is in your case no intelligent, voluntary submission to gospel injunction, no obedience of love; or, rather, there is none of that love which in its eager desire of service outstrips obedience, and in its longing to attain unto God bethinks itself little of waymarks and boundaries, and counts as nothing the weariness and dangers of the course.

Or, you are troubled with theoretical doubts which your investigation so far has neither disposed of, nor confirmed into scepticism. Dimly perceiving the light of Revelation, you stumble and stagger in the path of gospel precept, and while you do not dare, do not desire indeed to cast aside Christian obligation, there is a writhing of your whole nature under its bonds. You evince an increasing disposition to question and dispute, to renounce long-received principles and remove the

ancient landmarks, to propose private interpretations—in a word, to lean to your own understanding, and make a creed for yourself instead of finding it in the word of God. Laudably zealous in stripping off the last rag of superstition, you sometimes make sad inroad into the decent garment of faith. But amidst all this unbelief, pride, impatience, and self-will, you are conscious of a great want, a real perplexity, an honest desire to get wisdom—"the principal thing," yea, of a cry of your whole soul after knowledge, and a lifting up of your voice for understanding, a searching for her as for hid treasures.

With tolerably clear views of truth and ability to apply it satisfactorily, you are unsteady and light minded, anxious only about your final safety, not about your Christian faithfulness and progress. You have never allowed your conviction to become a habit of thought, and to affect and consecrate

both your spiritual and your physical being. Your religion is one of days, and ordinances, and forms. It is that of early instruction, undeveloped by individual processes and a continual abiding under the life-giving ray and ever-refreshing dew of gospel precept. It is the religion of those around you—their ordinary expression and average attainment. You do not altogether neglect your Bible nor restrain prayer. But you read with little attention and less application, then put aside the book and the teaching along with it. You pray with an unprepared mind, and repeat by rote, if not always the words, the thoughts of your petition. Entreaty for the continuation of your life and that of your friends, for the supply of your daily wants, for the forgiveness of your sins, without special acknowledgment or contrition, and for safe conduct to heaven, constitutes the whole of your communion with your God. Day

by day you address the greatest Being in the universe—your Parent, your Ruler, your Judge, and are never quickened into more earnest thought or deeper emotion. Partly from a sense of duty, partly from natural kindliness, you give freely of your money, and perhaps of your time and efforts, to relieve the necessities of your fellow-men. You recognize fully the *ethics* of Christianity, and submit willingly to many of its restraints. You may even be rigid in your construction of certain rules of practice which are variously interpreted in all Christian communities, and which would seem *moveable*—not non-essential, but contingent as to their precise character, and applicable without modification only to the motive and spirit of the acts to which they refer. Yet, very apparently to others and consciously to yourself, you lack something. Growth in grace; fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ; boldness and

access with confidence by the faith of him; strengthening with might by his Spirit in the inner man; the hope as an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast, the peace which passeth all understanding:—these and like precious and faithful descriptions of Christian privilege and attainment you find abundantly supplied in Scripture, and often as evidence of discipleship, but to you they are things hard to be understood, and that hitherto have formed no part of your experience. In the Christian course you find yourself so slowly brought forward that you sometimes ask, with most reasonable apprehension, How am I to reach heaven at last?

Your want is not prominently personal. You earnestly desire the conversion of others, and by this often unsatisfied longing you are tempted to distrust and despondency, perhaps even to murmuring and rebellion. You are a minister of the

gospel, and have spoken the word faithfully to your people—that word which is like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces. You have taught them not only by preaching, but by incessant effort of self consecration, of individual appeal, of sympathy with their trouble, of patience with their ignorance and slowness to believe, and of meekness under their injurious language or conduct. In all these things your heart condemns you not, but they have not hearkened to receive instruction. If there is any result of your toil, it is so imperfect or unapparent, so little in proportion to your striving and desire, that you are ready to conclude that the Lord restrains you in this way of usefulness, and will no longer be entreated of you as to the matter. But you cannot forbear. His word is unto you the joy and rejoicing of your heart: it is as a burning fire shut up in your bones, and with the prophet you must still cry,

"O Lord God, cease, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small." Or, as a private Christian, your present solicitude is for the spiritual welfare of some individual. His turn of mind, his course of life are wholly averse from gospel doctrine. No careful, discriminating selection of modes to approach him, no tenderness, watchfulness, or forbearing, has as yet seemed to produce any effect. He remains unconvinced by your reasoning, untouched by your silence and gentleness, unmoved by your fervent appeal or upright example. Your faith staggers, and dares not the toilsome path of hoping, persevering, yet deferred petition. Has God forgotten to be gracious? Is this poor soul, so precious to you, the life of your life perhaps, of no account in the Divine calculation?

We might multiply indefinitely cases of spiritual want. What should we do but declare that every-

where there is conscious need with perception, more or less perfect, of possible supply. Suffering friend, in the instances adduced, you crave, either for yourself or others, a benefit which is closely connected with the glory of God and the spread of his dominion. You discern in yourself, along with sinfulness and helplessness, a desire to increase in the knowledge of God and to refer all your interests to his care and control. It is the frame of mind which he approves and which his word and providence are designed to produce. Large as may be your request, small the present grace, and beyond all seeming possibility the desired attainment, your hope should not fail, seeing that it is for a good concerning which God will be inquired of and which he has promised freely to impart, though he make not known the counsel of his will in reference to you. In nothing is the promise more full than with regard to spiritual blessings.

In proportion to your reliance on God, to the *looking unto Jesus*, which, some one remarks, might be the motto for every hour, to your petition for wisdom and succor against temptation, and for a fuller inhabiting of the Spirit, will be your attainment in these and depending gifts and graces. Zeal, activity, entireness of consecration, must keep pace with progress in humility and love to God, must increase with increasing perception of the debt we owe to him, and with recognition of his claim to our service. There is no remedy for faint-heartedness like nearness to God and the application to him which is fervent from a sense of your want, which is hopeful, not so much from the strength of your desire as from conviction of his lovingkindness and from dependence on his promise. You will take care not to pervert this rising of faith and trust by presuming that all things will work for good to you according to your estimate and desire of good.

Having confidence in both the righteousness and the mercy of God's dealings, you will endeavor that this confidence be as strong in trouble as in deliverance and prosperity. You will keep before you that it is your part to follow, not, by your own interpretation, to lead Providence in self-proposed arrangements and strong desires, in rashly appropriating precedents and pronouncing as to the preservation of your life and your exemption from evil. Verily, there is in Holy Writ large promise to the righteous of these very benefits and a record of their full communication. But do we therefore intrude into God's counsel or limit his operation? Both sacred and profane history testify that he has showed great and sore troubles unto them that trusted in him and walked in the way of his commandments. They have gone mourning all their days, and been grievously afflicted and tormented. They have been sick and in prison, hungry, thirsty, and

naked. They have wandered on the face of the earth, been reviled and contemned, yea, stoned, torn asunder, and burned. Like theirs, your discipline and course of preparation to the end of your earthly existence may be through kindling flames and deep waters of trial. But what of that, if the ages of eternity as they pass behold you safe and at peace in God's blissful and glorious presence? Then, give thanks always for all things unto God;—

> "Not thankful when it pleaseth me:
> * * * * * * *
> But ~~each~~ a heart whose pulse may be
> Thy praise:—

and how needful as well as reasonable that you should in every thing give thanks, *for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you!* Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, rejoice;— "the only command," we heard one say, "which I find with such immediate repetition." How plain the duty, how full the sanction, how abund-

ant the cause of joy in the Lord! By this cheerful submission to his appointment, this continuing instant in prayer, is secured a far more important good than the object of your desire—the highest attainment perhaps that a Christian can propose in his discipleship. It is the habit of glorifying God,—the employment of heaven begun on earth; the magnifying of his wisdom and love above our reasonings and hopes, the accepting of him practically as Ruler and Judge; and the viewing of self as the creature of his love, the recipient of his promise, and the object of his faithfulness. Put then far from you that distrust and apprehension which eat into your peace and sap the foundation of your spiritual prosperity. How can you wander if you keep close to God? How can you exalt yourself if you are ever at his footstool? How can you be alone if his presence go with you? How can you fall in following hard after him if his right hand uphold you?

SCRIPTURE GIVES ENCOURAGEMENT TO PRAY WITH REFERENCE TO THE SMALL INTERESTS OF LIFE, OR SUCH AS ARE OFTEN CONSIDERED UNSUITABLE SUBJECTS OF PETITION.

THE man of God, for whose second appearance Manoah entreated the Lord, having come again when seemingly he was not expected, for "the woman sat in the field, and Manoah her husband was not with her," Manoah proceeds to ask how the parents shall perform their part in accomplishing the proposed consecration of their son:—"How shall we order the child, and what shall we do unto him?" Confident he must have been, if we may judge from his prayer, from his prompt following of his wife into the presence of the stranger, from the Amen, "Now let thy words come to pass," which prefaces the next inquiry, that a wonderful event was to occur, though as yet he knew not that it was

signified by a heavenly visitant. But with a zeal most worthy of notice to establish the counsel of God, although assured that it could stand without his aid, he seeks the requisite instruction. The training of a child who was to be a Nazarite unto God and to commence the work of delivering Israel out of the hands of the Philistines, was likely to differ from the ordinary method of Jewish education. The angel adds nothing to directions already furnished to the wife, and adapted to enable her to set forward even before his birth the work of her child's separation to a special service. We may fairly derive a lesson from this portion of the account. The training of children begins with the training of parents. If parents obtain a personal fitness and an accurate spiritual instruction, the work of education will prosper. The directions here regard the mother rather than the child; indeed all concerning him

is more in the form of prophecy than of specific command, yet "the child grew and the Lord blessed him." Manoah, grateful for the announcement, asks the name of the messenger that when his sayings come to pass the parents may do him honor, or acknowledge his faithful utterance of the prediction, and recall their joy in prospect of so unlooked-for a blessing and distinction. It was a natural request, the first vent for the full tide of emotion, but the angel withheld the favor:—"Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?" Did he rebuke an otherwise allowable curiosity in order to concentrate all Manoah's thoughts in thankfulness and praise? "So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the Lord." Thereupon, the answer to his petition, refused in one form, is afforded in another, and to his fuller instruction and encouragement. "And the angel did wonderously; and

Manoah and his wife looked on. For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on it and fell on their faces to the ground. But the angel of the Lord did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then *Manoah knew that he was an angel of the Lord.*" The name which he had asked after was "secret," *i. e.*, Wonderful, incommunicable, yea, incomprehensible by human intelligence; and the divine nature and authority of the Angel-Jehovah were declared by a marvellous work. Manoah's conceptions had not embraced all God's purpose in thus making him a conscious and favored agent of a merciful design toward the people of Israel. Truly, Manoah had more than he could ask or think. The Lord prevented him with his goodness, and granted him, if not his petition, far more than his desire. He needed not

to tarry till the fulfilment of the prediction to do honor to the messenger, for already the sign of the Lord was added unto his word.

It has before been remarked that though the Scripture is most abundant in the promise of spiritual blessings, it supplies ample assurance concerning those of a purely earthly character. Miracles, as evidence of divine authority, were necessarily for the most part manifest to the senses. There was as great an exercise of power in forgiving sins, as in causing the impotent man to rise, take up his bed, and walk; but the latter was a visible operation, and clearly discernible in its progress and results. Respecting miracles, it is much to our purpose to note that they were performed not only on momentous occasions, but also in reference to needs and perplexities which seemingly were of much too small account to become subjects of petition to God. Not only did the sun

stand still and the moon stay until the people of Israel had avenged themselves upon their enemies; not only did the waters of Jordan divide to let Israel pass over dryshod; not only did the walls of the enemy fall at the sound of trumpets, and at the bowing with all his might of a man; not only did darkness cover the earth, rocks rend, and graves open, to attest the finished work of the Redeemer; not only was sight restored to the eyes, soundness to the limbs, reason to the mind and life to the dead; but iron was made to swim, that what was borrowed might be returned to the owner; water was made wine for the more bountiful entertainment of festive guests; and a piece of money was found in a fish's mouth that the poor fisherman's tax might be paid, and tribute rendered to whom it was due.

Let us not forego our privilege and deny ourselves the benefit of precedent thus divinely af-

forded and preserved on record for our instruction. The mistake is not that we make known too many, but too few, of our requests unto God. He knoweth our frame, and will he not admit the representations and entreaties that arise out of a poverty and helplessness like ours? In a condition where so many diverse agencies are at work, and not in concert but in permanent antagonism, where the most sustained efforts of our higher intellectual nature are incompetent to elevate us in the scale of being, or to secure to us the means of existence or happiness, how numerous and pressing are our necessities! How little we apprehend them, how mistaken is our action in reference to them! The good which would be our individual good, which would best develope and cultivate our nature and form for us the most effective method of working out our mental and spiritual welfare,—that good we pass by and take in its stead some nominal, self-

styled good which glitters in a tinsel gaudiness. Even if we know to choose the good, how feeble our instruments, how few our opportunities, how indirect our progress, to attain to it. All things, we conceive, hold a relation to the mind of God different from that which we have established. To him our great things are even as the small—nay the small, even the contemptible in our eyes, may have been specially set by him to operate as the larger instrumentality. We overlook too much the influence on ourselves of little things. We are not careful enough in our analysis. We dread, and in a measure justly, the dwarfing and dwindling of our mental stature by a continual stoop to observe the phenomena at our feet. We dread that the microscopic adjustment will impair the power of wider survey. But it is the lesson we must learn to fix our sight long on no single object, to mark the mote in the sunbeam and the bow in the

cloud, the spear of grass by the roadside, and the star that afar off in the firmament quivers in the fulness of its own light and loveliness. The mind fixed to one focus, moving only in a groove, may discern much and work profitably ; but it can never attain to the clearness and activity of that intelligence which regards the mean as well as the mighty, which has no limit but its own sphere, no line that will not measure both the lofty and the low. Truth is not always in a corner nor at the bottom of the well, neither does it soar away to the heavens and for ever inhabit the mountain tops. Pervading all being, it now bears a message from the bowels of the earth as to things before the flood, now reveals the secrets of the skies, measures the distance of the heavenly bodies, computes their cycles, declares and accounts for the phenomena of the future. Moral truth comes by special revelation from God, is twin-born with all physical discovery,

speaks in emphatic tone from the volume of history, or, in still small voice imparts to the individual the lessons of his consciousness and experience. Thus we shall be wise only as we retain the mind of the learner, and accept instruction from every offered source. It is a vast and rich store-house in which our God has placed us. To explore its chambers and acquire the treasure, is an imperative duty as well as one of the highest enjoyments of which the human mind is susceptible. The supply is inexhaustible. Gems of purest ray lie scattered and unappropriated. If our wisdom is derived from objects so close at hand and apparently so valueless as to be overlooked in our search after what is brilliant and elevated, how reasonable that we place a high estimate upon our smaller interests and rid ourselves of the fear of carrying them to God! What we need is the humble, trusting, docile spirit, not

what we deem the worthy argument or fitting occasion. See how the heart deceives itself! It disclaims for self the plea of merit, but transfers it from self to the occasion. Multitudes of Christians shrink from the seeming incongruity or irreverence of asking for things which in proportion they require as much as they do their daily bread. How few, for example, pray for relief from ordinary bodily infirmities. We call loudly enough when death threatens, and we return thanks as if we were confident that our prayer for deliverance had been heard. Why may not God regard our less positive need, our familiar and daily trouble, our habitual thorn in the flesh, our consequent unsoundness of mind and diminished opportunity of service? Why may he not rebuke the personal ailment as well as the pestilence that wasteth a nation? In any case it is he alone who gives skill to physicians and efficacy to their remedies; and so long as like Asa,

king of Judah, we look to them and not to the Lord, so long we may spend our substance and be nothing bettered.

How few Christians pray in the less important domestic and social changes! Life, said Mme. de Staël in reference to happiness, shows better in large portions than in the daily record. So we view it in its moral aspect. The history minutely given of one day, of a day not of the eventful, but of the even tenor of those which make up life,—what is it to the Christian? Of a life ended you can perhaps say much, even with caution and moderation. You can count up your deeds of charity, your words of kindness, your Sabbaths faithfully observed, your hours spent in reading the Scriptures and in prayer, and, be they few or many, the sum will show a general course of honesty, benevolence, and piety. But take at random one of the days which have made up this life, and what is the ac-

count which it will be likely to furnish, particularly in regard of Christian progress and peace? How to the faithful liver is each day filled with trials called *petty* because they are familiar, with discouragements which would be insignificant in description, but which sicken the soul and palsy every effort! A chance word, a thoughtless interference, an unwelcome claim, a child, a servant, a visiter, may disturb the composure of your mind as well as the order of your plans. A light touch destroys the balance that you had adjusted with such pains. The calmness and mental elevation to which in the morning you had attained with such effort of self-examination, contemplation, and prayer, and which you thought would be preserved through the day, have yielded to a feeble, seemingly impotent assault. You have lost your just gained foothold on the rock, and are tossed about on the sea of your undisciplined feelings and unsound

judgment. Or, like a stray child, you look around you bewildered and helpless in the world's wilderness. And you are a stray child! Confident in your knowledge of the way, you have withdrawn from the Father's presence, wandered from the path in which you were set and the thick darkness of absence from the Light of life, now closes around you. The first lesson in Christian service is humility; faith, dependence, zeal, and activity are the second; and we may not invert the order, or we destroy the character and end of Christian performance. Preeminently do the sins of the tongue oppose our progress and heap up occasion for shame and discouragement. You began a discussion in the love of truth and spirit of peace, but pride of opinion and impatience of opposition mixed themselves with the zealous affection for a good thing, and gendered a strife of words in which you dishonored the cause which

you meant to recommend. You proposed to elevate your adversary to your own or a higher level, and you have descended below his. Often in your private and public discourse the pleasant sound of your voice lulls your Christian caution, literary or religious vanity comes in like a torrent on your fluent periods, and it is no longer Jesus, your Teacher, your Saviour, but self, a crowned, exalted, applauded self, that engrosses your thoughts and attracts your affection. You possessed at one time a large measure of spiritual peace, a sense of being right with God, reconciled and at rest with him. Almost imperceptibly, by want of watchfulness, by suffering other thoughts to intrude, this "joy in the Lord" has passed first into a natural and legitimate animal exhilaration, then into lightmindedness, and lastly into foolish talking and jesting, which truly were not *convenient* to your Christian character and attainment, for they have lessened

your influence, prevented your growth, and separated you from your God.

Oh to bring our religion into every day life, to decorate and glorify that life, gloomy, distasteful, unlovely as it often is—to hallow it, groveling, sordid, impure, and idolatrous as we make it, with the brightness, sublimity, and holiness of Christianity! Our spiritual progress demands such application. The martyr spirit advances to the faggot and the rack, but shrinks from the personal inconvenience, the slight bodily derangement, the deferred hope—from the long list of trials of patience and temper induced by the ignorance and folly of our fellow-man, or our own lack of caution and self-control. We commit ourselves in our time of meditation and prayer to God's direction, and are ready to submit to it in every particular; we can forgive our worst enemy, dethrone our idols, endure with calmness and trust bereavement, poverty, and death. In

that frame of mind we cross our threshold, are met by some trifling test of our Christian principle, and—where is it? We were equal to the casting down of Satan, and the trampling under foot of all his temptations, and behold us snared and prostrate by his unsuspected nets and stumblingblocks!

Christian service requires the *minutest* application of the principles of the gospel. We bring our public confession of Christ, our charities, our observance of the Sabbath and of humanly appointed seasons, and we do well. But how is it as to all personal habits, all family rule and plans? Do we fear that the Master will not regard some little self-denial, will not accept some offering or consecration, because it has small outward influence, possibly no bearing whatever but on our habit of contemplation and grateful acknowledgment? Let us go for answer to the blessed book which has precept for every perplexity, comfort for every

sorrow, and, for marvellously numerous instances of each, examples of imparted instruction and relief. Take the account, in the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of Mark, of Mary, the sister of Lazarus, who, having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard, very precious, brake it and poured it on his head. Some who were present had indignation and said, "Why was this waste of the ointment made?" Like many in the present day, they did not recognize that when love to God fills the heart of a brother, we need not concern ourselves much about the mode of its manifestation, nor censure and condemn him because he denies himself or does his Master's work in a fashion different from ours. The Saviour, who cared for no "costly oblation" or personal decoration, whose meat was to do the will of Him that sent him, came to the assistance of the timid and tearful woman. It is to our thinking one of the most

beautiful acts of his life, one of the most sustaining and cheering records of his wonderful tenderness, of his readiness to receive our smallest tribute and relieve our most insignificant distress. "Let her alone; why trouble ye her?" The word *trouble* is, if we mistake not, from a root which signifies to *annoy intensely*, to *wear away*, even as the reproaches of well meaning men, who argue incorrectly on, it may be, just premises, do excessively distress and irritate. There are exceptional cases which the discrimination of ordinary observers is not delicate enough to discern, but which, at least, the heart of every Christian should be large enough to embrace. There may be a development of spiritual life which is strange and of doubtful value simply because of its extraordinary vigor. We err greatly if we seek to trim evenly or train in identical direction the plants in the Lord's vineyard. "She hath wrought a good work on me;"—a *beauti-*

ful work, in the original. To have sold the ointment for more than three hundred pence, and to have given them to the poor, might have been a *good* work: to anoint her Master with her precious ointment, to do what she could to honor him and give expression to her great love and gratitude. was—you objecting and contemning, because unenlightened and unloving Pharisees! — a *beautiful* work which remains a memorial wherever the gospel shall be preached. If the Saviour accepted this offering of no relative value, this simple perfuming of his person, this fond lingering near him, this ministry of an affection unconscious of its own depth and its worth in the regard of the great object, this tribute, so humbly, carefully, tenderly rendered, will he not accept the offering that some other troubled, destitute, fearful, it may be, but *loving* soul shall bring to him? Is there no help, no pity, no tenderness, but for Mary of Bethany? Was it only as a reward to her that the memory of her act

was made perpetual? Was not encouragement designed for the trembling and the sorrowing, for the timid woman, the ignorant child, for those who can perform no great service, who have no offering specially appropriate or valuable to the great cause of the Redeemer? Ah, there are ways in which even the jewels and perfumes, the costly works of art and appliances of luxury, the personal decoration or endowment, the much prized ointment, the profuse and beautiful hair, may be consecrated to the service of the Saviour, and become, as well as the bells of the horses and the pots in Jerusalem and in Judah, "holiness unto the Lord!"

It has been said that the miraculous attestation of the Divine approval of Manoah's offering was far fuller evidence of goodness and condescension than the communication of the messenger's name would have afforded. A conviction of weakness and want, and of the power and lovingkindness of God, leads naturally, inevitably it would seem, to

the act of prayer. If his eye takes in all our case, and his heart all our necessity, what more do we require? It may please him to answer us to the letter of our petition. The thing desired may be good for us, or the conferring of it may contribute to strengthen our faith in the prevailing power of prayer. But if we receive not as we ask, we shall find, if we watch and wait, that we shall still receive, and more largely perhaps than we asked. It is not needful to exemplify. Christian biography furnishes ample confirmation of the declaration. Our own experience, if we heed its testimony, can be eloquent in the matter. "He who observes providences," says Doddridge, "shall have providences to observe." There may indeed be a wrong reading of God's promises of protection and supply. Foregoing our humility and submissiveness, we may conclude that God will order events according to our desire, and we may so pervert the doctrine of his minute providence as to deem it

exercised for our simple convenience and enjoyment. We may speak with an undue confidence which sometimes passes into a revolting positiveness, and we may use great swelling words of vanity instead of the cautious expression of consciously ignorant and helpless creatures. In many a mode does the rebellious heart assert itself. If in no other, it will prefer a claim to a distinction in providential dealing, will presume a larger experience, anticipate a fuller reward, and interpret as Divine plans the workings of its own will, and the suggestions of its inordinate affections. Even in the way of self-renunciation may self be constituted the centre of the moral universe. Viewed rightly and in connection, the doctrines of God's special providence and of his readiness to admit all our requests are among the most precious revelations of the gospel. They solve our perplexity, remove our fear, diminish our grief, and lift us permanently into heavenly-mindedness and peace.

GOD'S PAST DEALINGS ARE A GROUND OF CONSOLATION AND CONFIDENT EXPECTATION.

We have seen that Manoah and his wife, as they beheld the wondrous ascent of the angel, fell on their faces to the ground, and that Manoah then knew that this messenger was an angel of the Lord. One would suppose that this fearful servant of God had been strengthened in faith and trust by what had happened, that he would feel himself the agent of God's designs, and as such, however imminent the present danger, sure of protection and blessing. But it is not always that faith increases with manifestation of truth, gratitude with benefits, and love with perception of excellence. To the Israelites Moses had occasion to say, "You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes * * * * * the great temptations * * * the signs and those great mira-

cles: yet the Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and ears to hear unto this day." If Manoah was familiar with the history of his people, he might at this time have had present to his mind a portion of their experience very similar to his own, and replete with instruction and comfort. "Behold," said Israel, "the Lord our God hath shewed us his glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire: we have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth." But Manoah said to his wife "We shall surely die, because we have seen God." She rejoined, "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and meat offering at our hands, neither would he have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these." This woman was indeed a comforter and help in the Lord to her husband. She reminded

him of what he had beheld, of favors already conferred and showed to him the unreasonableness of supposing that God would frustrate his own plans. With the argument of Manoah's wife would we approach you, Christian mourner, and may God who manifested himself to these his servants reveal in some measure to you also the wisdom and mercy of his dealings!

It was, if we mistake not, Dr. Samuel Johnson, who said in substance that at a certain point in the acquisition of knowledge it would be almost as profitable to recall all that has been learned and forgotten as to gain more. That this to some extent is true, is proved by what is observed of the man of a mental capacity moderate except as to the faculty of memory. He seems continually to rise to an intellectual level much higher than his own. Memory, as described by some writers on the mind, implies two things,—*the power of retain-*

ing knowledge, and that of presenting it to the mind when occasion requires. Retentiveness, according to this view, is the characteristic of the first power, *readiness,* of the second. We question that a careful analysis shows this twofold operation. Memory is also defined as *the revival of a mode of consciousness experienced: the power of recognizing as former objects of attention the thoughts that from time to time occur to us: the keeping of those simple ideas which have been received from sensation or reflection.* Perhaps it is as accurately and more simply exhibited as *the action of the mind in relation to past time.* Memory is governed in all its exercise by laws of association. Skill, whether original or acquired, in the application and modification of these laws, constitutes the excellence of the faculty. A mind largely provided with principles, which in their proper use become precedents, is, in some cases, fitted to deal with new

modes and combinations of thought equally with the mind endowed with large reasoning power, or ready perception of the relations of ideas. Thus is seen, in one aspect at least, the importance, *intellectually* considered, of the cultivation of memory.

As a means of *practical instruction* the importance of this faculty is not usually estimated as it deserves. Few persons *study* the past either as to its general or individual record. Very few have any conception of its treasures of minute and various precept. The minds of men, especially in this active, even restless age of the world, are occupied with the present and the future. We detect a smile on the lips of the young as we bid them pause in their course, cast a backward glance, and learn a lesson from what it discerns. Yet, "the thing which hath been, it is that which shall be." The object which causes us to rise early, to deny ourselves, to risk health, happiness, and even life, has been

pursued as eagerly by others; the passion that possesses all our being and influences all our action, that by turns enraptures and agonizes, and rules in its strength even in our dying hour—that passion has thrilled through other frames and perhaps taught its lesson to other hearts. Nay, our impulses and emotions continually repeat themselves. There is an ended history of our inner life. Years pass and it begins again, to present new scenes and actors but to conclude much as before. How would it be with us if careful retrospect could impart wisdom—if we would examine our chart, look out for signals of rock and shoal, and prosecute the voyage of life ever mindful of already experienced peril and loss?

Little account is taken of the past by many Christians in reference to its *sins*. It is not that these should cast their pall over the remaining portion of life, that we should hug to our bosom

the gnawing remembrance of guilt and misery, or carry a cross which our Saviour has lifted once for all as to time gone by, and will remove for evermore if we agree to take upon us in its stead his easy yoke and light burden. No, our sin is not heaped up in awful accumulation to overwhelm us with shame and despair through life, and, if remitted, to be so only at life's end! He who is at once our High Priest and our Victim stands ever near, not indeed to make, or to give himself, another sacrifice for sin, but to apply freely the unfailing virtue of the offering already made. That fountain for sin and uncleanness is never dry, nor, like the pool of Bethesda, does it cleanse only at "a certain season," and a few of the many who resort thither. We afflict ourselves needlessly, and contrary to gospel teaching, on account of our past sins, if they have been truly repented of. But there is an aspect in which we would do well to hold them ever present. It is

that of the instruction which they impart. If we observe closely the temptation and the yielding, recall the shame, suffering, and penitence, shall we not walk more softly, and be more watchful of coming dangers? The way is covered with snares and slippery places, and if God has hitherto plucked our feet out of the net, and brought us up out of the horrible pit and miry clay, shall not our eyes be ever toward him in review of the dealing as in hope of deliverance?

The consideration of the past is important in respect to the *temptation* with which we have successfully struggled. The modes of rescue from our spiritual foes are many. At one time, we recognize in the thick of the conflict a strength beyond all our consciousness and expectation, a strength seemingly irresistible, and which wins a speedy and easy victory. At another time, there is no such power. With the desire to triumph,

the will seems dead to every stimulus, a faintness and prostration of spirit, so intense that it seems half physical, takes hold upon us, we feel the hopeless sadness or indifference of the victim for whom escape is impossible, and we cease to pray and to strive:—let the matter go as it will, the trial is too hard—resist as I may, I must yield at last! But we were not permitted to yield. Some diversion took place. The discipline was afforded, and not invariably in the way of punishment. Some new interest or pursuit, some unexpected calamity or blessing, diverted us from the train of thought, and at the edge of the precipice withheld us from the plunge. At times, trifling influences have been endowed with a power never known before. Wrought up to a frenzy of passion and self-will, some sweet, familiar song, some act, or tone, or look of ordinary kindness, some glimpse of a grief greater, perhaps less than our own, some

vision of old age crouching under disease and want, of wan and wretched childhood begging by the wayside, of man going to his long home and the mourners going about the streets — the lightest touch, the gentlest breeze, may reach the answering chords, and the whole soul vibrates in harmony with God's appointment and gives forth notes of acknowledgment and praise. Reader, this is no imaginary sketch. Look into your life, and you also may see the living lines, and they may remain to you an indelible record of your Father's faithfulness and mercy.

The consideration of the past is undervalued by many Christians as a means of *encouragement*. The special providence of God in relation to ourselves is an open book with instruction in every page and line, and most of us read it carelessly, if at all. We have asked with earnestness a blessing and have not watched for its coming. We prayed for

the conversion of a friend, and have since neglected to observe his course, or perhaps have not given a thought to his spiritual condition. We set ourselves to attain to some Christian grace, to secure some outward benefit, and, as we labored, forgot to depend on the guidance and aid which we had implored. If we failed, we lamented our ill fortune or management, and perhaps murmured against God. If we succeeded, we looked still to self, gave to self the honor, and withheld it from God. Christians rarely view themselves according to their actual privilege. If a man takes into consideration all his being and circumstances, what satisfaction should it afford to him to receive at the outset of life from a supremely wise and powerful being an assurance of the most minute care and direction on the sole condition of an absolute committal of self to his disposal! The Christian is assured by the facts and promises of

Scripture that God will thus provide for and guide him, "will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing," and "make," or *turn*, as for his refreshment, "all his bed;" that if he be "poor and needy," the Lord thinketh upon him; if he be in ignorance or perplexity—"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye;" if men speak evil of him—"He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light and thy judgment as the noonday;" in the day of battle—"I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him." Whatever and how numerous soever the afflictions of the righteous, he may know that "the Lord delivereth him out of them all;"—"He keepeth all his bones. not one of them is broken." "He that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about;"—showing, according to Matthew Henry, that he shall not depart from God, for mercy shall keep him in, nor

shall any real evil break in upon him, for mercy shall keep it out. A "rock that is higher than I" in the stormy sea of life; a "covering of wings" on this cold earth, where, moreover, foes hover continually around; a "hiding-place," a "sun," a "shield," a "fortress," a "shadow from the heat," a "strong tower,"—by all that imagery can convey is God presented to us in lovingkindness and tender mercy. If, Christian, these declarations are not sufficient warrant for confidence, if you cannot commit yourself to this Preserver and Benefactor, what shall satisfy you, to whom will you look for the supply of your vast, your life-long necessity? "If,"—to renew the fervent appeal of the younger Mason—"you ask for better assurance than his words of promise; if that will not fortify you against the ills of life and death; if you have not learned, with the father of the faithful, against hope to believe in hope, 'not staggering at the

promise of God through unbelief,' make thorough work of it; cast away his name, his badge, and his livery; take all the comfort that sense can bring you; but do not, whatever else you pretend to, do not set up for a believer in Jesus Christ!"

We go a step farther. God has not only promised but performed. To prove this, by conducting the reader through the fields of sacred and profane history and of Christian biography, would be a task prolonged indeed but of most successful accomplishment. But it is only to our reader's individual experience that we now desire to refer. We would urge the review of ordinary and extraordinary blessings and trials, and observation of the fact and mode of deliverance from affliction. "Let it be when these signs"—to us in these days the proofs of God's past providence and love—"are come unto thee, that thou do as occasion serve thee, *for God is with thee*." The survey of

God's dealings communicates ample and permanent encouragement. Without contemplation of his arrangements we cannot receive instruction nor experience gratitude. "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?" Christian, the Master's question is put to you. *So long*—and do you know him yet? *So long*—so many mercies, so many opportunities, unobserved or neglected! *So long* his voice sounding in your ears its teaching, its reproof, its warning, its comfort, and you have not *yet* gathered its meaning! The sheep knows the shepherd's voice and follows him, but how have you followed your watchful, loving Shepherd? How tender the appeal to Philip! How touching the reference to the many and varied scenes through which the Teacher and his disciples had passed! It pains acutely to be "not known," to be misunderstood by the objects of our solicitude and love, to find our principles, motives,

and labors contemned or disregarded. Did the Saviour in his human nature feel something of this sting when he addressed his delicate and mournful interrogatory to the slow and cold disciple, who after so many instructive occasions failed to dis-discern Christ's Divine nature and ability? When under the pressure of doubt or sorrow we have lacked faith in his power to deliver or sought help from some earthly source, do we think that no appeal is made to us? Truly, we ought *to know* him, ignorant, helpless as we are; we ought to know *him*, our Elder Brother, our Teacher, our Guide, our Master, our Saviour, *our Lord and our God!* We have need *to know him*, for only when we know God—God in Christ, can we say with Philip, "It sufficeth us!"

The argument for the Christian's encouragement in trial on account of God's past dealings, is not fairly brought to a close without adverting to such

affliction as seems not to admit of this mode of consolation. There is sorrow which has no parallel in the sufferer's experience, and which is a "mystery of darkness" both as to its own intensity and as to the indications of Providence. It hides for a while the Father's face and surrounds with thick clouds the throne of his judgment. "Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me. Is it good unto thee that thou shouldest oppress, that thou shouldest despise the work of thine hands?" "Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet thou dost destroy me." There are periods when life in its round of mixed and moderate pleasure and pain comes to a dead pause. No fair prospect remains, every cheering voice is silent, no flickering flame bursts up from the embers of hope to kindle the soul afresh into light and warmth. As we approach such grief, our step falters and our heart grows faint. There is but

one comfort for thy trouble, poor, suffering soul! and what if thou canst not put forth thy hand to receive it? If thou wert only bruised and bleeding from the assaults to thy peace, we might pour oil and wine into thy wounds, raise thee to pursue thy painful way, sustain and strengthen thee with words of kindness and hope. But what when life seems ebbing away, when the eye refuses to brighten, and the chill of hopeless despondency is creeping slowly over the frame!

Christian brother, you have lately met with the severest affliction of your life, possibly in your circumstances and with your temperament the severest that you could endure. You had some blessing, which, as a Christian, you held watchfully over self, thankfully toward God. With its possession was identified not merely your present enjoyment but your spring of action, your largest opportunity of usefulness. In its absence the

feeble knees tremble and give way, the once busy hands stiffen and droop. Your soul grew strong on that nourishing supply. The clouds of gloom, doubt, self-tormenting speculation, vanished in your sky, and clear, warm was the ray that shone on your path of duty. This blessing brightened every corner of your abode, dignified the humblest office of your hands, pervaded the intricate mazes of your mental operations, raised you above petty cares, furnished you ever with a standard of attainment, was in the past an unfading memory, in the future, a fair, outspread landscape of varied and rational enjoyment. In your estimate and affection it was inferior only to the God who gave it, to the uses he connected with its enjoyment, and to the self-denial in relation to it which was your willing sacrifice inasmuch as *he* demanded it. This anxiously guarded treasure, more than any other drew your heart to the heaven where decay and

violence cannot come. By your intensity of appreciation this gift became to you a gracious influence, increasing your love for God, the giver, for God, the fuller source of knowledge and happiness. This blessing was one of the highest forms of earthly affection and pursuit,—scarcely, indeed, *earthly*, so much did holy and eternal principles and tendencies constitute and characterize it. It was the love of a wife, a child, a friend, devotion to science or art, a congenial and widely useful occupation. Whatever it was, the elevating, hallowing influence was, in different degrees, still the same. Whatever it was in your case, it is gone. Physical disabilities, poverty, death, have ended your connection with it for ever. Your condition seems hopeless to yourself and to others. It may be so as to the lost possession but not as to future tranquillity and peace. Why limit God's resources, why weaken his power, distrust his mercy, forget

his love? Cling you to the thought of the past with such clenched hand that you cannot stretch it forth to Him who would sustain and deliver you? That much prized blessing is removed, and no argument of ours can make the fact other than it is. The arrows stick fast and there is no soundness in your flesh. But He who conferred the benefit may design a greater, and at least will not disregard your positive necessity. "By all these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit: so wilt thou recover me and make me to live." You thought to serve Him in a good way; He finds for you a better. You thought honestly to be the more faithful for the talents committed to you, for the happiness that filled your days—to increase in personal holiness and in Christian influence; but God shows you that you shall not only obtain "a little strength," but learn to walk without human help or earthly

stay. The discipline is severe, but it is administered in measure and in mercy. That on which you rested is taken from you and you fall, but you shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth you with his hand. The cup which your Father gives you, surely you can drink. The soul of the Son of God was exceeding sorrowful even unto death. "If thou be willing, remove this cup from me," was the utterance of his humanity; but in mockery, and scourging, and death on the cross, he drained the cup, and oh, the blessed result to men of forgiveness and salvation! There is scarcely a parallel between his sorrow and yours, between his submission and yours, between the support which he received and that which you have reason to anticipate. Unto him in the hour of anguish there appeared an angel from heaven strengthening him. Unto you is afforded the record of his suffering, his death, his perfected atone-

ment, his sure salvation. But there is a regard in which a resemblance may exist between your Master's trial and yours:—"being in an agony *he prayed more earnestly*."

You who suffer with Christ are privileged to pray to the Father to whom he prayed. Like him you may obtain strength not only to sustain your burden but to seek sorrowing yet unwatchful souls, and address to them your counsel and warning. If your consolation seems long delayed, if prostrate you must remain, at least be, as the Israelites in their humiliation, on your face before God in penitence and submission. This helpless attitude is not hopeless. There are those who can tell of an entire casting of the soul upon God, of a crying unto him which is hardly prayer in form though wholly prayer in substance: — Lord remember! Jesus help me! I am blind, let me receive my sight! I am weary, give me rest! Thou art so full

of mercy. Manifest it to me now! I ask not that my sorrow be taken away, if it is thy will that I bear it. But I do ask, I plead, I strive with thee that thou wilt remove this feebleness, this despair, that thou wilt fill me with trust in thee, and comfort me not with my desire but with thy love. It is utterly impossible that you place yourself at God's disposal, to accept what he sends and perform what he requires, and that you continue to exercise towards him this cheerful submission, without receiving his protection and support, perhaps even, *according to your faith*, some unexpected and bountiful provision. In the deepest distress there come at times alleviations other than spiritual, unlooked for mercies, streams of refreshment from sources hitherto concealed. But though a blessing *may* be granted in this form, in another it is certain and sufficient. *If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons.* This is the consola-

tion which aboundeth, the end of faith, the fulness of peace. You have the evidence of sonship not because you sorrow, but because you sorrow after a godly sort. You find it sweet to draw near to your God, sweet in present trouble to thank him for past mercies, sweet to say, Even so, Father! sweet to feel that, however it was before, you are right with him now. There seems established a relation between yourself and your Creator,—a relation on your part more filial than you could have believed possible. A general reliance on his wisdom you had, a vague desire to conform to his will, an undefined hope that he would work some good thing for your soul. Now you are not quite so anxious for the "good thing"—for the smaller measure of spiritual benefit—as for the nearness to God, the continuance of his daily support, the bow in the cloud, the strength in your weakness so plainly not your own, and therefore so

precious and abiding. Oh, not your own! for if you leave but one moment the attitude of dependence and entreaty you are tossed back into the arena of conflict and fear. Strong bulls of Bashan beset you round and gape upon you with their mouths. You are poured out like water, all your bones are out of joint, and your heart is melted within you like wax. Thoughts of past happiness, of purposes broken off, and of a future without interest or hope, unnerve and overwhelm you, and you cannot repair to the covert provided, to the stronghold of Divine presence and protection. But if you preserve your nearness to God by submission to his appointments, study of his word, and prayer, it is as if you saw and talked with him. He sustains you with firmer supports than those to which you were clinging. As earthly things retire, the love and service of God become prominent. *Communion with God* was once to you simply a

familiar phrase, denoting a Christian attainment which, from its purely spiritual and mysterious nature, you supposed would remain to you and to most persons an object of wavering desire and imperfect endeavor. It is now a condition of your being, a permanent habit of your thought. Your views of Christ assume in a measure the character of the figured love of the Church. As you turn, baffled and unsatisfied, from the pursuits and intercourse of life, your soul unmistakeably calls out, I will seek him whom my soul loveth. My beloved is mine and I am his. Come unto me for I am sick of love—I am weary of low thoughts and earthly contact. I yearn with unspeakable longing for strong support and holy affection. I sleep in this dull atmosphere, but my heart waketh to hear the voice that calleth me. My beloved is the chiefest among ten thousand, yea, he is altogether lovely.

The lesson which affliction thus improved teaches to the Christian is not forgotten. An estimate is affixed to earthly things which never afterward materially varies, and their influence on his affections is permanently contracted. Heavenly love is distinct from earthly love and is susceptible of only partial comparison and description; but the Christian can confidently affirm, that it is his strongest principle, his spring of action, his sufficient consolation, and the power by which he can say, "None of these things move me,"—that is, none long disturb my mental balance, none change my general conduct of life, none separate between me and my God. It is not his design that in this life I should attain to an absolute superiority over them. It is his will that I suffer; when I fall, he has allowed the stumblingblock to be placed in my way; but

Though I fail, I weep:
Though I halt in pace,
Yet I creep
To the throne of grace.

Full often I sit under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit is sweet to my taste. He bringeth me to his banqueting-house and his banner over me is love.

In our earlier Christian studies, we viewed such representations as have just been attempted of attainable steadfastness and peace in the midst of trouble, as to a great extent literary embellishment, the unsubstantial suggestion of the writer's enthusiasm, or the delusive promise of his soul's longing and weariness. As such, they would but mock the suffering and disappoint the expectation of the afflicted. Our heart grew bitter within us at *words, mere words.* We continually read and hear much on the subject of consolation that is

irrelevant and ineffective, undiscerning and heartless. So, mourner, our reasoning may seem to you. But at least give ear to us when we urge that you will never obtain relief, by which we do not understand the happiness that you have lost, or some earthly equivalent, but composure and cheerfulness, until you are willing to *consent* to the trial, to accept it as God's appointment, possibly, in the way of discipline, certainly, to the end of your greatest and permanent advantage. Your natural regret must not admit ingratitude and repining, nor your wounded spirit disqualify you for the duties of your condition. The joy of deliverance and of new mercies, if it come to you, will come with tenfold delight that you "waited patiently," that you desired more the accomplishment of God's will than of your wish, that you have the profit for which he afflicted you, and that henceforth nothing can divide you from his love.

A great German physician defines disease as "an accidental or spontaneous reaction of the system against a morbid cause;" and another writer has nearly the same thought:—"all sickness is the struggle of nature against a morbid cause, and is the result of a double and distinct action, viz., of a morbid action produced by a morbific cause, and constituting an *affection;* the other, a healing action set in operation by a vital, healing energy, and constituting *reaction.*" According to this view, sickness is a beneficent violence, a timely warning, an intimation of a hidden evil, a friendly tap on the shoulder to stop and mark the approaching danger. In close analogy is the working of sorrow in our moral system. It is a struggle, or reaction, against the morbid action of sin. The moral organization is unsound, for sin dwells in the flesh and spreads its poison through the spiritual nature; and though in the case of the Christian the pro-

cess of purification is begun, it is not in this life made complete. If sin obtains greater influence and impairs the health of the soul, sorrow calls attention to the peril, obliges the sufferer to inquire into the cause, and gives him no rest until he discovers and applies the only remedy adapted to his case. To a certain class of persons prosperity is especially favorable. It imparts confidence and freedom to the apprehensive and self-distrustful, who too gladly grasp the blessing to hold it carelessly, and therefore, ungratefully. But in the case of most persons prosperity hardens. Adversity commonly makes the heart tender, the conscience sensitive, the will pliant, and seems designed to prepare its subject for that fuller operation of the Spirit which moulds and developes the whole being, until an unformed and earthy mass is instinct with grace and beauty and becomes the perfect man in Christ, the fair type of that renewed

and glorious nature to which hereafter it shall attain.

We have said that affliction may be the means of establishing a new and definite relation between the soul and its Creator. Theological writers consider the love of God to his creatures in the twofold aspect of the love of *benevolence* and the love of *complacency*,—the one, exercised towards all the sentient creation, the other, excited by the moral action of the creature. The love of man towards God is also that of complacency, or approbation of his revealed perfections, and it is in addition the love of gratitude. It is common to us as creatures to adore God in creation and providence as *our* Father. But there is a point where an individual relation begins, where the Universal Cause becomes the Father of *my* spirit, and where all that is distant, vague, abstract, is brought near, defined, and concentrated. In the fulness of our wonder and

delight we exclaim, "Who is like unto the Lord our God who dwelleth on high, who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth?" We do not attain to this state by inattentive observation, feeble desire, and careless, aimless advance. The eyes must be opened, the heart made soft, the feet set in the way of God's commandments. This is the working of godly sorrow.

If we consider man's capacity of loving as it exists in reference to his fellow-men, we may obtain some imperfect notion of what it may become in reference to the greatest and best of beings. There is a love of instinct, of propinquity, of habit, of benevolence, of pity, of gratitude, of complacency, or approbation. But the love of which we would speak—human love in its broadest signification and fullest exercise—is not partial in its character nor contingent in its manifestation. It ex-

hibits all forms and is independent of all. It is free yet involuntary, discerning yet fixed, inexhaustible in its nature, and never satisfied in its wants. It seeks for its object ever greater attainments, more perfect resemblance to the highest beauty; it frames the compact which, according to an American writer, is the noblest that can exist between man and his fellow—"Let there be truth between us two for evermore!" It is the love which bids defiance to time, is not subject to change, which pervades all thought and action, which dwells in the eye, rules the tongue, informs the mind, cultivates the taste, and imparts to the whole spiritual being the dignity of its own heavenly and eternal nature. It is the purest and most God-like of our emotions,—nay more, it is *of God*, dwells awhile among created things, but rests only in Him from whom it is derived. The intellect is in one view the superior portion of the mental organiza-

tion. In its exercise man seems most removed from the brute creation, and assumes the image of Him who is not only the Framer of his body but the Father of his spirit. But the emotion of love, when brought under the purifying influence of the Holy Spirit, would seem to constitute man's noblest distinction. There is everywhere a bound to the exercise of reason. There is none to the exercise of love. It supplies all deficiencies, solves all problems, overleaps every obstacle, is wide as the world, high as heaven, immortal as the soul. But why essay we to speak of that which the tongue of Paul could not utter? Enough is it for us as for him that of abiding faith in Christ, hope of heaven, and love to God and man, the greatest is *love!*

For this illimitable capacity there is corresponding provision. Love embraces earthly objects, but is filled only by the fulness of God. A being

eternal, immutable, infinitely powerful, wise, and good, becomes to man his Father, his Saviour, and his Sanctifier. Imperfectly declared by the things that are made, God is comprehended, beloved, and adored in the person and teaching of Jesus Christ. *God hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God. He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.* Mark how perfect the circle of gospel truth! How gloriously these blessed declarations, these rays from the Sun of righteousness, concentre in the divine nature and tendency of love! Truly our fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ!

Scripture is given to declare the design of God with regard to the human race. As the agent of that design, the second person in the Trinity is

prominently set forth. His nature, character, and authority are variously and fully exhibited. Of him prophets spake, and the desire of the souls of men was for his appearing. The object and results of his mission are fully announced, not in the seer's dim vision of the distant glory, but by the lips of the God-man himself, who stands as if with outstretched arms, imploring men to come unto him and be saved. Thus in the sacred volume one thought predominates. The scheme of man's redemption by Jesus Christ provides that *in all things he may have the pre-eminence*. Some one has said that the "glory of Christ" is the *idea* of the Bible. It is the same proposition as that which we have stated. Christ has the pre-eminence in man's justification, being made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him; he has the pre-eminence in sanctification by his promise and gift of the Holy Spirit; and "the only

wise God, our Saviour" accomplishes his ministry of reconciliation, by presenting his faithful ones faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. He shall have the pre-eminence over every human object in our affection and service. He shall have the pre-eminence over the flesh, the world and Satan, over death and the grave. This Christ Jesus, thus of God made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, it also behooved in all things to be made like unto his brethren that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. The arrangement was complete. The scheme was vast and comprehensive. and its execution thorough to the minutest details. The superior nature is not satisfied with such knowledge of the inferior as the creator and fashioner thereof might obtain, but will set aside its own divine excess, change its sphere and contract its

vision, assume the semblance of itself, and become acquainted in yet another mode with the condition and characteristics of humanity. This was to the end that mercy be of perfect quality, that faithfulness in no jot or tittle be found wanting!

Such is the Saviour who offers in all time to all who are troubled his sufficient and enduring consolation. You who are in heaviness through manifold temptations cannot doubt, in view of Scripture assurance, that he is able to succor you. Do you still hesitate to apply to him? The record is very full respecting the application and exercise of his ability. His appeals are not indefinite and inconsequent statements. His performance is simple, prompt, effective; and its mode, manifest, gracious, suggestive in the highest degree, and directed often to another than the obvious intent, producing benefit relative as well as personal, eternal as well as temporal. His expostulations, persuasions, and

invitations are earnest, affecting, winning, beyond all precedent or human standard. We even learn that this Jesus *wept*, and, on the occasions given, not for his own but for others' sorrows. If you have not been gathered under the wings of that tenderness, it is because "ye would not." Look on him a little longer as he stands before you in human shape. "This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem!" Observe the kind and encouraging gesture; listen to words of an infinite wisdom and love! Behold him until the divine and glorious form so fills you with delight that you cannot remain afar off! Give ear to him until every other voice is silent, and one gracious meaning possesses and controls your soul! Then the detaining grasp of that earthly care is loosened, and you find peace and rest in his embrace. Then your language will be, not the cavil of your doubt and inexperience,—

"What is thy beloved more than another beloved?" but the confident and rejoicing testimony,—"Now we believe, not because of thy saying, for we have heard him ourselves!" Oh to have such an apprehension of God's lovingkindness, such an unvarying trust in his care, such a view of the action in concert with regard to man of the ever blessed Godhead, that we may be unterrified by the trials of life, that its sufferings may produce a stronger faith and more perfect love, and that when we are deprived of ordinary hopes and enjoyments we may obtain in their stead "the treasures of darkness and the hidden riches of secret places!" What matter if we sorrow, what matter even if we have greatly sinned, if now we sit at Jesus' feet and have washed them with our tears, for our faith shall save us, and sorrowing or sinning we go in peace! The bruised spirit scatters a more fragrant perfume of gratitude and love. The flame

of the consuming sacrifice goes up toward heaven from off the altar. It is not for human thought to rove at will through the courts of heaven, or to behold other scenes than those that are revealed. But among that white-robed throng are there not some of more radiant mien and vesture, some who bend lower before the throne, some whose voices ring out from the general harmony a more thrilling acclaim of thanksgiving and praise? How, mourner, shall your weeping endure through the night, when this inconceivable joy surely cometh in the morning? Why wait for your translation to enter on this blessed service and taste the delights of God's presence and love? The treasure, though it be in earthen vessels, is already yours; already with open face you behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord; already has the change begun into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord.

The conversion of sinners is always longed for by the true child of God. In his maturing spiritual life there comes a period when the progress of the converted is an object of nearly equal solicitude. "Sometimes," wrote James Alexander, "I am almost as glad to observe a ripening as once to observe a conversion:"—"I thank God for his mercy to —— though now I am almost as anxious that he should be the right sort of Christian as I was that he should be converted." As Christians, we direct our course toward the same mark but pursue it with what different degrees of vigor and steadiness. We may so conduct it, laying aside every weight, that we shall run and not be weary, and with such fixed gaze on the prize as to increase immeasurably our desire and hope. To promote in some degree such spiritual effort is the object chiefly proposed in these pages. We have endeavored to ascertain by the light of

Scripture what is the "promise of the life that now is," and to observe some of the modes of its fulfilment. From this examination of things written aforetime for our learning we have derived lessons of encouragement, consolation, and confidence in God. But our connection with the subject does not terminate here. Not only nor mainly does the Christian live for his own instruction and comfort. *The glory of God* is the proper end of all his action, all his knowledge, all his suffering, and all his enjoyment. The consideration of God's faithfulness should induce not only firm trust and lasting peace, but fervent love and entire consecration to his service. To them that fear him he has given a banner that it may be displayed because of the truth. Patriarchs, apostles, and prophets, saints and martyrs, a great cloud of witnesses, a multitude that no man could number, have set forth this truth concerning a covenant-keeping God by lives differing

it would seem in every thing save the manifestation of patience, submission, and obedience. "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord."

As we have heard, so have we seen. Blessed be the Lord, * * * there hath not failed one word of all his good promise. According to thy name, O God, so is thy praise unto the ends of the earth. Fellow Christian, this God is *our* God. He is our God *for ever and ever*. What offering shall we bring? What new song shall we sing unto the Lord? How shall we give unto him the glory due unto his name? How in some measure declare the mercy that is everlasting, and the truth that endureth to all generations?

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